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ABSTRACT

The paper, intended for a Chinese audience, examines roles and functions of the school psychologist in special education in the United States in the context of federal and state (Maryland) legislation and in correctional institutions. Some of the minimum roles of the school psychologist are to serve on the preplacement team, conduct student assessments, provide assessment information, and participate in student evaluation and program planning on the evaluation team. Additional roles may involve crisis intervention and consultation. Obstacles to the expansion of the school psychologist function include lack of training in specific skill areas and the large amount of time required by the assessment function. The role of the school psychologist in correctional institutions is additionally hampered by the need for security; the high numbers of disabled youth, particularly learning disabled youth, in corrections; the lack of adequate staff; and the lack of continuity in staff. (DB)

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ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE PSYCHOLOGIST IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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PSYCHOLOGISTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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**ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST
IN SPECIAL EDUCATION**

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 is an extension of the United States of America Federal and State laws that require all children to receive a free public education. Generally, the law provides a system for identifying and providing services for children and youth of school age (birth through age 21 in most states), who may have handicapping conditions and who may need specialized instruction to meet their individual needs. Individuals with special needs as well as those persons accused or convicted of committing crimes and delinquent acts share the rights to a free and appropriate public education (Federal Register, 1977).

Historical and Current Roles

School psychologists are individuals who "provide psychological services to education." According to Fagan (1986) these services initially consisted primarily of diagnostic testing to place students in special classes and were provided by school based and other clinics during the period of 1890-1950. Currently, school psychologists are heavily involved with the implementation of federal and state laws regarding education.

During the 1970's, a new era began for school psychologists and special needs students. With the passing of the first special education law in 1970, there was a change in the special education delivery system. Instead of testing for placement and planning and the overreliance on the psychomedical classification system, the emphasis changed to evaluation for identifying exceptional students (Fairchild, 1982), and to provide more comprehensive psychological services based upon the student's needs (Conoley & Gutkin, 1986).

Numerous studies have surveyed the roles and functions of school psychologists. One study (Benson & Hughes, 1985) found that school psychologists spend about 50% of their time in assessment activities, 20% in consultation, and 30% divided among the activities of counseling students and parents, inservice, administrative, research, and program evaluation. In this national survey, Benson and Hughes also observed that school psychologists would prefer to spend more time in consulting with school personnel and less time in assessment. Conoley and Gutkin (1986) reported similar results and noted that the majority of services provided were indirect. They concluded that psychologists need to increase their influence on teachers and parents in using diagnostic information appropriately.

Multiple Roles

School psychologists perform multiple roles to help meet the demands of their particular school situations. Although there is a rising number of school psychologists, approximately 5,000 practitioners in 1970 and about 20,000 in 1985 (Fagan, 1986), the provision of psychological services to educational facilities have not kept pace with the needs of special education. Consequently, each state department of education in the U.S. and other countries (e.g., Australia and the Republic of Ireland), specify the most important tasks for the school psychologist. This is intended to "spread resources as widely as possible" (Chamberlain, 1985) and to provide the state education agency or district with assessment flexibility.

The Maryland State Department of Education requires school psychologists to perform primarily an assessment function. These include being a member of the preplacement and evaluation teams, conducting assessment, and providing feedback relative to the assessment. In Australia, special education services are also administered by the education department (Ritchie, 1985). However, school psychologists are called guidance counselors and

their roles and functions vary depending on the location and type of school, primary, secondary or both. Duties include diagnostic assessment, special education placement and referrals, consultation with parents, teachers, and other professionals, vocational and educational guidance, counseling, and to a lesser extent, program development, evaluation, and research.

School psychologists in the Republic of Ireland function more as administrators and consultants than their U.S. and Australian counterparts. Chamberlain (1985) reported that in the Republic of Ireland the school psychologist's role is limited to advising and monitoring the activities of guidance counselors and remedial teachers. There is little direct contact with the students. These psychologists take their lead from the Department of Education and give advice to teachers concerning individual differences among students, maladjustment, assist with vocational choice, facilitate the learning process, organize inservice courses, and sometimes develop achievement tests for school use. In the Irish educational system, there are no school psychologists in either primary or secondary schools, primary school psychological needs are provided by voluntary nonstate agencies.

The remainder of this paper examines the limited roles related to special education, presents additional roles and functions, and shows how these roles relate to the provision of

special education programs for adult offenders in Maryland State correctional institutions.

Minimum Roles Related To Special Education

Preplacement Team Member

Each state educational agency in Maryland maintains a preplacement or pupil services team. This team is responsible for referral, screening, identifying personnel, arranging for appropriate assessment procedures, and in reviewing the results of these assessments for students who may have difficulties at school which do not usually require special education services. As a member of the preplacement evaluation team, the school psychologist serves as a consultant who examines and analyzes educational data, reviews intervention techniques already used, and makes recommendations to the team concerning new or modified interventions.

Conduct Assessment

Earlier in this paper it was pointed out that the primary role of most school psychologists is still assessment. Assessment takes priority because it is the prerequisite to appropriate education and intervention (Conoley & Gutkin, 1986; Thurlow &

Ysseldyke, 1982). Student assessment may include the following: administration of a standardized test of intelligence, a visual motor test, variety of educational test, tests of adaptive behavior, to formal or informal evaluations of behavior and personality.

In Maryland, every student who is identified through the screening process as possibly being handicapped and in need of special education services is referred for subsequent assessment. The screening process begins with information from a number of sources -- teachers, parents, students, other agencies, physicians, and/or counselors to begin the first stage for possible special education services. A comprehensive evaluation is required that all these pupils receive an educational evaluation, as needed, and an evaluation of the pupil's cognitive, emotional and/or physical functioning.

Examiners qualified to do assessment of cognitive functioning, as specified in Maryland Bylaw 13.04.01 are licensed or certified psychologists. A licensed or certified psychologist and a licensed psychiatrist are the only individuals qualified to assess emotional functioning. The assessment of intellectual ability and emotional functioning are especially needed to determine learning disability and emotional disturbance.

Psychological re-evaluations are part of the special education process. Both federal and state laws mandate that individuals receiving special education services should be re-evaluated at least every three years. Elliott, Piersel and Galvin (1983) found out from their survey that re-evaluations are needed for: (a) confirmation of a diagnosis; (b) measurement of educational progress; and (c) updating services for the individual. While the intent is positive, these authors point out that re-evaluations are perceived as having less value for teachers than for psychologists, since the results do not usually lead to changes in diagnosis or placement. Guidelines for re-evaluations vary from state to state and may range from a comprehensive evaluation, similar to the initial one, to classroom observations and interviews with parent, teacher, and/ or student. These re-assessments contribute to the disproportionate amount of time that psychologists spend on assessment.

Provide Assessment Information

Psychologists are important and effective in the intervention process. They report assessment information relative

to the student's ability, achievement, and emotional adjustment. They they contribute data that can assist with the formulation of and evaluation of educational services and interventions. The written report of a psychological assessment in a school setting has two main purposes. According to Teglassi (1983), the psychological report clarifies the nature of the problem and delineates implications and/or guidelines for actions that are utilized by consumers of the report.

Participate With the Evaluation Team

In Maryland, in cases where a child is being evaluated to confirm a suspected learning disability and to identify the pupil's needs for special education services, the evaluation team includes but is not be limited to: (a) the pupil's regular teacher; (b) a teacher or specialist with knowledge in the area of the suspected disability; (c) a professional qualified to assess intellectual ability and emotional functioning; (d) and professional qualified to do diagnostic evaluations, and other professionals, as needed, to assess the pupil in all areas related related to the suspected learning disability.

Frequently, examiners will need to be included based upon

the unique characteristics of the pupil and the nature of the information needed. As a team member, the psychologist shares data with the team that will assist in the decision making process for diagnosis and placement (Pryzwansky, 1981). The psychologist's participation with the evaluation team in preparing a written report of the results of the evaluation is important to clinical decision-making. The team provides a potential forum for the sharing of different values and viewpoints. Pryzwansky (1981) proposed that school psychologists should work with other professionals routinely not only for the state mandated team participation but they should take the initiative in establishing team work. Pryzwansky believes that routine team work would provide positive benefits for students, organizational effectiveness, and increase the attractiveness of the psychologist. This can serve as a vital link in promoting team relationships that are not mandated by special education laws. Ritchie (1985) pointed out that psychologists are supported by remedial teachers, speech therapists, and other specialist services (Ritchie, 1985).

Additional Roles and Functions

While psychologists perform the required roles of

diagnostic services and these absorb the majority of their time, psychologists desire to expand their skills and services. (Benson and Hughes, 1985). Consumers, teachers, and parents are also clamoring for more of the school psychologist's resources. Fairchild (1982) indicated that consumers want psychologists to provide more direct services to students. Teachers are asking for assistance with instructional program designs for both regular and special education students. They want psychologists to intervene in crisis situations, provide individual and group counseling to students, assist in behavior management programs, and provide inservice training geared to alleviate academic and behavior problems. Like the school psychologists, parents and teachers see the need for follow-up and program evaluation (Fairchild 1982; LeCayo, Sherwood, & Morris, 1981).

Additional roles and functions are desirable for several reasons. Basically, school psychologists provide indirect services (Chamberlain, 1985; Conoley & Gutkin, 1986; Ritchie, 1985; Thurlow & Ysseldyke, 1982) and an expansion of roles would provide more direct contact with students, for example, through the provision of counseling services. Research and evaluation would allow the psychologists to cross-validate assessment results

and analyze psychological data for educational program planning implications.

School psychologists can function as consultants. Distenfeld and Richardson (1983) proposed ways showing how the school psychologist, as a consultant, can utilize their skills to deal with conflict resolution, group processes, and in improving teacher effectiveness. Fairchild (1982) envisioned school psychologists as assessment consultants who will provide training in test utilization, test interpretation and nontest assessment, serve as staffing facilitator, and as information synthesizer. As consultants, school psychologists can engage in system level interventions (Curtis & Metz, 1986). They can use this "most underutilized of the indirect service delivery methods" to change systems.

School psychologists can help to promote health and well-being. Shellenberger and Couch (1984) perceive a need for cooperation between the medical and school professionals in an effort to assess and remediate the pupil's learning and behavior problems. These authors stress the role of psychological factors in the course of illness and believe that since the child spends a major portion of the day at school, increased interaction between school and medical personnel would enhance students' functioning.

Obstacles to Additional Roles and Functions

Training in specific skill areas may be needed for additional role functioning. School psychologists would like to engage in more consultative functions (Fisher, Jenkins & Crumbley, 1986). However, they perceive their training as inadequate in this area (Fisher et al, 1986; Meyers, Waitz, & Flanagan, 1981; Meyers, 1978). While system level interventions are desirable, Curtis and Metz (1986) find school psychologists lacking in organizational development methods, thus limiting their potential as consultants. Stewart's study (1984) indicated that more school psychologists would like to engage in more research activities. But, desired research activities may be constrained by training, research cost, and time.

While school psychologists and their advocates would like to see roles and functions that include consultation and research, there are several obstacles that mitigate against the concept of the "expansive role." First, assessment takes up most of the psychologist's time, therefore, educational requirements must be prioritized. Secondly, while the lack of training and exposure is an issue for many, there are well-trained psychologists, skilled in many areas, who must also make assessment the primary task.

The strategy of personnel is another factor that helps to dictate the priority of activities.

A Dilemma

School psychologists are caught in the web of having to prioritize time for assessment required of special education, the cries of parents and teachers for more direct involvement, (e.g., crisis intervention, drug abuse, suicide, vocational issues), and their own burning desires to spread their professional wings into additional roles and functions for which they are trained. In addition, the demands of special education outweigh the supply of special educators and school psychologists, and beyond the issues of the school psychologist's desire to expand roles and functions are the limitations of training and experience.

Special Education in Corrections

Correctional institutions are the most restrictive environment for the administration of special education. This poses both a threat and a dilemma to the provision of special education services. It is a dilemma because security takes priority in prisons and freedom of movement can be restricting. It is a threat because the law mandates special education services

for eligible students and security and special education are not a natural blend.

Generally, the primary roles and functions of the school psychologist in corrections are similar to those of the noncorrectional school psychologists, as required by the Maryland State laws and bylaws. The provision of special education services follow the same steps practiced by noncorrectional institutions in locating potential students, referral, assessment, evaluation, diagnosis and placement.

Psychological evaluations also make up the majority of the time that the school psychologist spends in adult corrections (Hestick & Teglassi, 1987) and in juvenile institutions (Morgan, 1979). Morgan reported that 42% of the children in juvenile correctional institutions have handicapping conditions and the most prevalent types were: (a) educable mentally retarded; (b) seriously emotionally disturbed; and (c) specific learning disabled. The diagnosis for each of these conditions require psychological evaluation and team participation.

Correctional special education faces a greater and more complex difficulty in hiring full time school psychologists and special educators than do the traditional noncorrectional schools. Consequently, special education services are curtailed in many

juvenile and adult institutions. In addition, many of the second-level functions of school psychologists become primary ones in corrections since there is little comprehensive information available regarding educational history, levels of services previously received, and types of interventions attempted.

The lack of continuity of services and the scarcity of school psychologists in corrections create a burden to correctional special educators. School psychologists and special educators must exert more time and energy in building up an educational data base, performing evaluations, and/or trying to locate and retrieve prior educational records. In Maryland, consultant correctional psychologists who are familiar with psychology, psychometry, and the realities of prison culture (Hall, 1985) are engaged to ease the burden of assessment. This frees some of the full time school psychologist's time thus allowing more time for the provision of other needed services such as individual and group counseling, inservice training, and follow-up and evaluation.

It should be pointed out that the free and public education of the U.S. does not apply to incarcerated adults. Incarcerated students who are found eligible for special education services are the only students with a legal entitlement to education. In Maryland, the range of disability in the prison

population is more limited regarding the type and severity of handicapping condition. The number of special education students is highest for the specific learning disability.

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